

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 4462

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, LA, TH

SUBJ: LAO REFUGEES IN THAILAND

REF: BANGKOK 10679

1. WE APPRECIATE MAGNITUDE OF PROBLEM WASHINGTON FACES IN DEALING WITH RESETTLEMENT OF VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIAN REFUGEES AND RECOGNIZE THE NECESSITY OF DISCUSSING WITH CONGRESS THE PROBLEM OF ASYLUM FOR LAO. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE DIFFICULTY OF A BLANKET PAROLE FOR NATIONALS OF A COUNTRY WITH WHICH WE CONTINUE TO HAVE RELATIONS. FOR THESE REASONS, WE HAVE AVOIDED IMPORTUNING WASHINGTON.

2. NEVERTHELESS, AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE'S REPORT (REF-TEL) BRINGS OUT SAD STATE OF UNCERTAINTY AND IMPOVERISHMENT OF LAO REFUGEES, SOME OF WHOME HAVE NOW BEEN IN THAILAND FOR 6 TO 7 WEEKS. IN CONSIDERING THE FATE OF THESE REFUGEES, THIS EMBASSY WOULD LIKE TO BRING OUT FIVE POINTS:

A. THE NUMBERS INVOLVED ARE RELATIVELY SMALL. WE STILL BELIEVE THAT THE TOTAL REQUESTING ASYLUM WOULD AT MOST BE AROUND 1500. WE BELIEVE THE 1277 FIGURE MENTIONED IN BANGKOK'S 10385 INVOLVES SOME DOUBLE
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COUNTING, SINCE MANY OF THE PEOPLE ORIGINALLY LISTED

BY UDORN HAVE PROBABLY ALSO CHECKED WITH EMBASSY BANGKOK WHILE THEY MADE THE ROUNDS OF THE UN AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES, WHICH HAVE NOT, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, ASSISTED THE REFUGEES IN ANY WAY.

B. MANY HAVE HAD A LONG AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. PERSONNEL AND PROGRAMS IN LAOS, AND HAVE BEEN CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE U.S. THEY WERE AMONG THE EARLIEST AND STRONGEST SUPPORTERS OF OUR POLICY IN THIS COUNTRY. WE SEE NO DIFFERENCE IN THE RATIONALE FOR PAROLING VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS ON THE ONE HAND AND LAO ON THE OTHER HAND. ALL THREE NATIONALS CONCERNED CANNOT GO HOME WITHOUT SERIOUS PERSONAL RISK, IN VERY LARGE MEASURE BECAUSE OF THEIR PAST ASSOCIATION WITH THE U.S. IF THE LAO DID, WE HAVE NO DOUBT THAT AT VERY MINIMUM THEY WOULD FACE LONG PERIODS OF "INDOCTRINATION." IN A WORD, COUNTRY TEAM BELIEVES WE HAVE AS CLEAR A MORAL OBLIGATION TOWARDS THE LAO, AS TOWARDS THE CAMBODIANS AND VIETNAMESE.

C. IN THAILAND THE LAO REFUGEES ARE FACED BY AN IMPOSSIBLE SQUEEZE: WHILE THE THAI, IN AN EFFORT TO PLACATE THE PGNU, HAVE PROMISED TO FORCE PROMINENT RIGHTISTS IN EXILE TO LEAVE THAILAND AND TO DEPORT THE REMAINING LAO BACK TO LAOS, THE PGNU HAS STATED THAT THE LAO IN THAILAND ARE TAINTED AND WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO LAOS.

D. THE LPF, WHO HAVE A REAL PARANOIA REGARDING COUPS AND PLOTTING, HAVE EVIDENTLY CONVINCED THEMSELVES THAT AS LONG AS THE LAO REFUGEES REMAIN IN THAILAND, THEY REPRESENT A THREAT TO LAOS. THE LONGER THESE REFUGEES REMAIN IN THE NONG KHAI-UDORN AREA (OR EVEN IN BANGKOK), THE MORE SUSPICIOUS THE LPF WILL BE OF THAI AND U.S. INTENTIONS.

E. FURTHERMORE, THE PRESENCE OF THE LAO RIGHTIST LEADERSHIP IN THAILAND OFFERS THE LPF A READY ISSUE ON WHICH TO ATTACK THE RTG. IT SEEMS TO US THAT THIS SITUATION PLACES THE RTG IN A DEFENSIVE POSITION IN ITS DEALINGS WITH PGNU.

3. IN SUM, THERE IS A RELATIVELY SMALL GROUP OF LAO IN THAILAND, WHO ARE INCREASINGLY DESTITUTE AND CONFIDENTIAL

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INSECURE, MOST OF WHOM HAVE FLED FROM LAOS BECAUSE OF PAST ASSOCIATION WITH THE U.S., AND WHOSE CONTINUING PRESENCE IN THAILAND WILL BE A CONSTANT IRRITANT IN THAI-LAO RELATIONS. WE THEREFORE STRONGLY HOPE THAT WASHINGTON WILL DO WHAT IT CAN TO EXPEDITE PROCESSING OF LAO CASES.

CHAPMAN

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